



Fast Blast

From the California Student Aid Commission

Fast Blast for April 10, 2007

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In support of the Commission's ongoing goal of providing California's financial aid community with proactive and current updates, we are providing this update on programs and projects. Please share this with any interested person who may not have received this newsletter.

Commission to Consider Revised Draft of the Institutional Participation Agreement

After a year of public review and comment, Commission staff has prepared a revised draft of the Institutional Participation Agreement (IPA) for the Commission's consideration at a public meeting April 19. This Agreement, which serves as the guiding operational document between the Commission and all institutions administering the Cal Grant program, is significantly different than its predecessor, and maps out more prescribed processes involving Cal Grant accounts, confirmation of student eligibility, information security, and much more.

In our most recent public comment period last month, we held two public meetings, a Web conference and 40-day comment period and tabulated more than 150 comments from our segments. I'm pleased to say that we were able to make a majority of the requested changes, which proved quite helpful in fine-tuning some of the operational procedures and time lines. We also used this feedback to help craft recommendations to six key issues that were initially raised to us by the Grant Advisory Committee, which proved invaluable during our deliberative process. These issues cover decentralization; interest bearing accounts; separate accounts; residency; confirmation of high school graduation; and IPA extensions/grace periods. Our goal was to strengthen a number of process areas, while being sensitive to resource constraints and possible impact to grant delivery for the students. It is also our hope that we can continue to work together with you in using our new real-time database, now under development, to help us automate some of these administrative processes to ease workload burden and streamline our grant delivery and reconciliation processes in the near future.

We welcome your feedback as we share our latest draft with the Commission. To view the new draft IPA, issue papers and comment opportunities, please visit <http://www.csac.ca.gov/doc.asp?ID=1282>

FAFSA4caster is new financial aid resource for families

The U.S. Department of Education released the [FAFSA4caster](#), a new online resource that students and families can use to get a quick, early estimate regarding eligibility for federal student aid. A new feature is that students can use the program *before* they reach their senior year in high school to help plan ahead for college.

The FAFSA4caster can simplify the financial aid process for students and parents. Features include:

- ◆ instant calculation of a student's eligibility for federal student aid, including grants, by providing an online estimate
- ◆ reducing the time it takes to complete a FAFSA online. *FAFSA4caster* is coordinated with the online FAFSA input program at fafsa.ed.gov. When a student begins to fill out a FAFSA online, after using the *FAFSA4caster* program, information from *FAFSA4caster* automatically "populates" half the fields in the FAFSA input screen.

Starting in September, the program will provide case examples of students' entire federal aid packages, including eligibility for federal student loans at various postsecondary institutions. These typical case examples will help students see how various aid programs can assist them with school expenses.

You can log on to *federalstudentaid.ed.gov* to find the program. It is available in English, and it will be available in Spanish in late April. Be sure to tell your high school juniors and seniors about this great new resource!

Chafee Grant Program awards hit milestone- more spots available

The Chafee Grant Program, which provides grant funds for college or career/technical school to qualifying foster youth and former foster youth, reached a milestone recently. In March 2007 the Commission topped 2,600 awards made to first-year and continuing students. The Commission is continuing to make Chafee Grant awards for the 2006-07 academic year.

Funding for the Chafee Grant Program comes from the federal government, and in 2006 the California Legislature allocated funds for the program in the state budget. For the 2007-08 academic year, the Commission can award up to \$13.5 million, the combined total of federal and state funds, to eligible recipients. The Commission administers the Chafee Grant Program through an interagency agreement with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

!2007-08 Chafee Grant application available now! The Commission is accepting applications for 2007-08 Chafee Grants. New students can go online at <https://www.chafee.csac.ca.gov/default.asp>, and fill out and submit the online application form or print a paper application form and fill it out. They might also wish to print a copy of the Frequently Asked Questions on that same site for reference.

Encourage and remind your *renewal* Chafee Grant students to fill out a 2007-08 FAFSA and to contact the Commission if they have any updates to their personal information.

Please let any foster youth know about this program and the availability of Chafee Grant funds for 2006-07 and 2007-08. Frequently, Chafee Grant funds help to make college or career school a reality for some of our most vulnerable students.

Cal Grant Training Academy Events scheduled

The Commission has scheduled eight CSAC Training Academy events around the state for the upcoming spring and summer months. The popular two-day Beginning Cal Grant Workshops, for staff with fewer than three years of financial aid experience, and the one-day Advanced Cal Grant Workshops, for more experienced staff, will be presented in May through August. A Commission *Operations Memo* with the details will be distributed soon.

Federal proposal to improve application for financial aid

In March, HR 1608 "the FAFSA Act" was introduced in Congress by George Miller, D-California.

Provisions of the "FAFSA Act" would improve and streamline the financial application process by:

- ◆ establishing a FAFSA-EZ form that would cut the FAFSA from its current length of five pages to two pages,
- ◆ creating a pre-FAFSA to allow students and parents to apply for financial aid while students are juniors in high school, providing families one extra year to plan for college cost coverage,
- ◆ encouraging coordination with the Internal Revenue Service to use information the government already has, eliminating the need for applicants to re-submit income and asset information they have already provided on their tax forms, and
- ◆ improving online access to the FAFSA.

The bill is in the preliminary stages of review at the federal level and the Commission is monitoring its development.

Financial Aid Fact Sheet available online in eight languages

The Commission has placed the Financial Aid for College sheet in eight languages online as separate PDFs that can be downloaded easily. The sheet contains:

- ◆ sources of free financial aid,
- ◆ basic Cal Grant information,
- ◆ how to apply for financial aid and a Cal Grant, and
- ◆ a brief financial aid Checklist.

The information is printed in Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Armenian, Hmong and Korean as well as English and can serve as a quick, basic handout to help students and families understand financial aid. The PDFs are from the *2007-08 Fund Your Future Counselor's Guide*. All items can be found on the Commission's Web site at <http://www.csac.ca.gov/doc.asp?id=40>.

Commission expanding year-round promotion of college access

The Commission is expanding outreach activities to help get the word out that financial aid is still available for students after the March 2 Cal Grant application deadline.

Two collaborative projects are underway with the California Community College's *I Can Afford College* campaign. Under development is a poster with general financial aid messaging, which will be distributed to California Community Colleges for May. Schools may view the newly-designed poster on the Commission's Web site, and it will be available to order. Additionally, if you are in the Los Angeles area, you may notice bus advertisements with our joint message.

A third partnering project is now being developed with The California Wellness Foundation's "Make It In Scrubs" public education campaign, which is encouraging under-represented minority youth to explore and consider a career in an allied health profession (e.g. radiology tech, phlebotomist or medical technician). Additionally, the campaign is targeting policymakers and opinion leaders about the need to increase diversity in health professions. The Commission hopes to team up with this exciting new program by providing interested students with supplemental financial aid information. Former state Senator Deborah Ortiz, one of the original authors of legislation for the Cal Grant Entitlement program, is working with the Foundation and the Commission to help develop this partnership. You can check out the program at makeitinscrubs.com.

Annual Review of *Fund Your Future* Materials Under Way

In March, the Commission and EdFUND launched the annual review of the *Fund Your Future* Workbook, Counselors' Guide, and Brochure – renowned financial aid tools for high school counselors and college financial aid advisors. Each year external review and suggestions by the Commission/EdFUND's partners in education provide valuable input to the process. In particular, the conference call sessions with CASFAA – this year on March 23 – and with CCCSFAA members on April 6 provided valuable suggestions.

In addition the materials will undergo extensive internal review before they are published this fall. Watch for these exciting new publications!

Cash for College workshops exceed 400 this year; post March 2 efforts underway

More than 400 California Cash for College workshops were conducted in 44 counties around the state in January and February, an increase of about forty percent from last year.

Additional program funding through a second-year grant from The College Access Foundation of California launched email and calling projects designed to inform students about upcoming workshops, provided tailored email responses to students who expressed potential barriers to completing their FAFSA, and provided for follow-up phone calls to more than 8,500 workshop attendees confirming completion of Cal Grant applications by the March 2 deadline, and for students who had not yet completed a FAFSA, directed students to the federal FAFSA hotline and more resources at upcoming May workshops offered at many California Community College campuses.

Commission uses email campaign to reach more than 21,000 FAFSA filers; provides Cal Grant GPA Verification Form link

Prior to the March 2 Cal Grant deadline the Commission also emailed more than 21,000 low-income high school seniors - who had filed their FAFSAs and who had not yet submitted a Cal Grant GPA Verification Form - to provide a direct link to the downloadable form. More than half of these students opened their emails and clicked through to the Cal Grant GPA Verification Form and calgrants.org Web site --a very high response rate according to industry standards. The email message also directed students to open a WebGrants for Students account to track the status of their Cal Grant application. We also learned that some students' Cal Grant GPA Verification forms had crossed in the mail and had not yet been processed. Some local financial aid offices received questions from students who received the email from us, and we apologize for any confusion this may have caused. As we continue pro-active communication strategies in the coming year, we'll use the Fast Blast alerts to help campuses and schools prepare to handle any student queries.

Online financial aid tools for high school students

Finding financial aid and applying to a college or career school are complicated, multi-step processes. Students and their parents need resources that help them do everything on time and not overlook a step. Helpful tools for students and parents include the colorful, multi-page How to Get to College Guide poster from the California State University, or CSU; the wide-ranging online Planning Calendar For High School from EDFUND; and the Important Tasks to Remember calendar check-list from calgrants.org. The CSU poster, available in five languages, the Planning Calendar and the Important Tasks calendar have year-by-year and month-by-month lists of actions students should follow to be successful in their hunt for college and financial aid.

You can download the CSU poster at <http://www.calstate.edu/ar/counselors.shtml>, the Planning Calendar for High School at edfund.org/students/studentpar.cfm?edfpage=/calendar/sp_calendar.html, and the Important Tasks list at calgrants.org/index.cfm?navId=21.

Talk with us- The Commission appreciates any comments or feedback you may have regarding the *Fast Blast*. Please forward your comments to fastblast@csac.ca.gov. If this message reaches school staff who are not currently on the Commission's ListServ and wish to be added, they can log on to csac.ca.gov and click on Links and CSAC List Services.

On behalf of the Commission and Commission staff, I want to thank
our financial aid partners for another successful Cal Grant financial aid season.



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